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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/ERA; NEA/MAG (HOPKINS/HARRIS); DRL  
(JOHNSTONE)  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: EU SEEKS GREATER COOPERATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
ISSUES IN ADVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING

REF: A. TUNIS 389

[1](#)B. TUNIS 409  
[1](#)C. 06 TUNIS 2482  
[1](#)D. 06 TUNIS 1390

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Ambassador, acting head of the European Commission and key members of the two mission teams met in advance of the November 12 EU-Tunisian sub-committee meeting on human rights. The US and EU missions shared the view that Tunisia has made too little progress in recent years on political liberalization and human rights. The EU will use its sub-committee meeting, and a long-delayed EU-Tunisia ministerial session on November 19, at which many other issues will also be on the agenda, to raise with the GOT concerns about the slow political progress. The Ambassador suggested issues the EU could raise, including how the GOT might level the playing field for opposition political parties in advance of the 2009 elections. The EU agreed to share the outcome of its meetings, and promised further coordination. We recommend that USEU express appreciation to the EU in Brussels for this coordination in Tunis and urge EU representatives in the two meetings to stress to the GOT the importance of further political opening. End Summary.

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Human Rights Sub-Committee Meeting  
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[1](#)2. (C) On October 31, the Ambassador and EmbOffs met with several members of the EU delegation, including Charge Bernard Philippe, as well as Portuguese Ambassador Maria Rita da Franca de Sousa e Ferro Levy Comes, representing the Presidency, to discuss the human rights situation in Tunisia. Philippe explained that the EU wanted to coordinate with the USG as it prepares for the recently scheduled November 12 EU-Tunisian Sub-Committee on Human Rights. This meeting had been on hold for over a year-and-a-half, due to GOT insistence that the meeting not take up "specific cases." Ultimately, however, the GOT agreed to the meeting, which will take place in Tunis, as the EU had made clear that it was a precondition for an EU-GOT Ministerial, which has now been scheduled for November 19 in Brussels. The EU will avoid raising specific cases in this inaugural meeting of the

Human Rights Sub-Committee, but it intends to hold more detailed discussions in the future.

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The Lay of the Land  
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¶3. (C) The EU human rights framework concentrates on seven main themes:

- Participation in Public Life (elections, etc.)
- Transparency/Corruption
- Judicial Aspects (prisons, judicial independence, trials, etc.)
- Compliance with International Conventions
- Freedom of Association and Expression
- Women's and Children's Issues
- International Cooperation

In reviewing the EU-Tunisia Neighborhood Policy Agreement Plan of Action on political and human rights issues, Ambassador and EmbOffs offered several ideas on how to translate the human rights-related principles in the Plan of Action into concrete changes on the ground. In doing so, we drew from a non-paper Post prepared (and provided to our interlocutors) that mirrors the checklist on freedom of expression and freedom of association steps laid out in our Democracy Strategy (Refs A and B). For example, under the rubric of strengthening democratic institutions, the Ambassador referred to the signals Ben Ali has given that he would like to see the ruling Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD) Party weakened and opposition parties strengthened. In this context, the Ambassador suggested encouraging greater separation between the mechanisms of the ruling party and the state, as well as expanding opposition party and NGO access to domestic television.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador explained that the USG has tended to focus on freedom of expression and freedom of association issues in Tunisia, as progress in these areas will provide the foundation for broader progress across the political reform spectrum. Philippe and the Ambassador concurred that US-EU coordination and cooperation represent the best chance at encouraging the GOT to pursue democratic reform. Philippe also requested information about specific cases for use during follow up discussions with the GOT, which the Ambassador promised to provide.

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Comment  
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¶5. (C) The conversation between the Ambassador and EU Charge confirmed that not only do the EU and US share many of the same goals with regard to promoting human rights in Tunisia, but we also face many of the same challenges. Beyond that, the EU faces the added complication of forging consensus among its disparate members, a point that Philippe openly acknowledged. Sustained US-EU cooperation represents the best possibility of persuading the GOT to pursue reform. Both sides view the period leading up to the 2009 presidential and legislative elections as an opportunity to encourage electoral reform. With this in mind, we recommend that USEU express appreciation to the EU in Brussels for this coordination in Tunis and urge EU representatives in the two meetings to stress to the GOT the importance of further political opening. In the end, however, the success or failure of reform efforts will depend on the extent to which GOT decision makers are convinced that those reforms are in Tunisia's interests, including by contributing to prosperity and economic growth. End Comment.  
GODEC